costs are completed the software program runs can generate as many as 50 preliminary alternatives layered onto the constraints map, color-coded by cost from red (most expensive) to green (least expensive).

QUANTM® , a route planning system to assist in the planning and environmental process, does not replace CAD or GIS systems for detailed design, documentation and presentation, but it does provide a great start for the engineers and planners addressing the alternative analysis phase of the project. Figure 1 (page 2) shows preliminary QUANTM® runs for the eastern terminus point. *Please note:* Only the eastern terminus point is presented here, as an example. QUANTM® runs completed for a more middle and western terminus point on LA 3127as well as lines drawn by the public can be reviewed on our website at www.north-southhurricanecorridor.com.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

As mentioned, we will be producing an EIS to document the decision-making process by which a preferred alternative is selected. The project team has been busy writing those portions of the Draft EIS we can while proceeding with other required tasks.

Input from the public and public officials at the 11/18/2004 public meeting is a critical component of the project. Comments received from the public and public officials during these meetings, including revisions to the purpose and need, are the basis for ongoing updates to the project.

By receipt of this newsletter the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is offering the opportunity for you or your organization to participate in consultation regarding historic resources pursuant to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) 36 CFR Part 800 regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. For additional information, please contact Ted Fridirici at 800 274-2224, extension 559.

The Project Team

Louisiana Department of Transportation & Development

Federal Highway Administration

Buchart-Horn, Inc.

Buchart-Horn, Inc. is working in association with these specialty consulting firms:

- Consoer Townsend Envirodyne Engineers, Inc.
- EarthSearch, Inc.
- GSE Associates, Inc.
- Shaw Coastal, Inc.
- Urban Systems Associates, Inc.

Where Do We Go From Here

The project team will continue refinement of what we know about the project area and the use of the QUANTM® Route Optimization process including possible elimination of costly, high impact alternatives. At the same time the team will continue development of the Draft EIS and continue the public outreach efforts culminating in our next Public Meetings in the Spring of 2005 where we hope to present a reduced range of alternatives being considered.

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Mailing Label Here

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Houma-Thibodaux to LA 3127 Connection Environmental Impact Statement

State Project No. 700-99-0302
Federal Project No. HP 9902(518)

Volume 2 *PROJECT UPDATE* *Winter 2005*

Substantial progress has been made since the first public meeting for the project in July 2004 and the last newsletter (Autumn 2004). The work being completed has been presented to the public through additional meetings, both on November 18th at Nicholls State University's Gouaux Auditorium and at a community information meeting on December 9th in Vacherie at the St. James Parish Westbank Reception Hall. In addition, prior to meeting with the public, the project team met with resource agency representatives and public officials. Comments received by the project team at these meetings are being considered.

The project team has been busy….

- Collecting information and creating maps to define and describe existing conditions in the project area, or finding out "what's out there"
- Revising the Purpose and Need to include a Transportation Link based on substantial input from the public and public officials
- Evaluating traffic and evacuation issues in light of Hurricane Ivan
- Developing a Scope of Work for a Preliminary Toll Study to evaluate funding options for construction
- Developing QUANTM® costing data, establishing engineering assumptions, and creating maps that reflect the initial QUANTM®-generated alternatives
- Developing portions of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Collection of Information

Evaluation and mapping of existing conditions in the project area is a critical initial step in complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA examines the impact of the proposed project on valuable environmental, cultural, and community resources such as wetlands, historic sites, and homes, among others.

Inside This Issue...

NEPA is a decision-making process. The document that will be produced is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS can be thought of as a tool used by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to make a decision on a preferred alternative, balancing impacts, costs, and ability to meet project need. Based on the evaluations completed to date, it is apparent that there are a wide variety of valuable resources in the project area. The information is compiled into a "Constraints Map." The map serves as the background onto which the engineers and planners, using the QUANTM® Route Optimization software, will try to place preliminary alternatives while avoiding impacts on the resources mentioned above. Figure 1 shows the constraints that the project team is considering as they start to develop preliminary alternatives.

Purpose and Need

As the project team is starting to collect information about the resources in the project area, they are also developing and refining the Purpose and Need for the project. One criteria by which alternatives are evaluated is how well they meet the purpose and need for the project. The purpose and need for this project is as follows:

Purpose

The purpose is to establish improved hurricane evacuation and provide a north-south functional transportation link to the roadway network including the interstate system in the South Central Planning and Development District servicing the Parishes of Terrebonne, Lafourche, Assumption, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, and St. Mary.

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Historic structures such as the Laural Valley Plantation buildings are a valuable resource in the project area

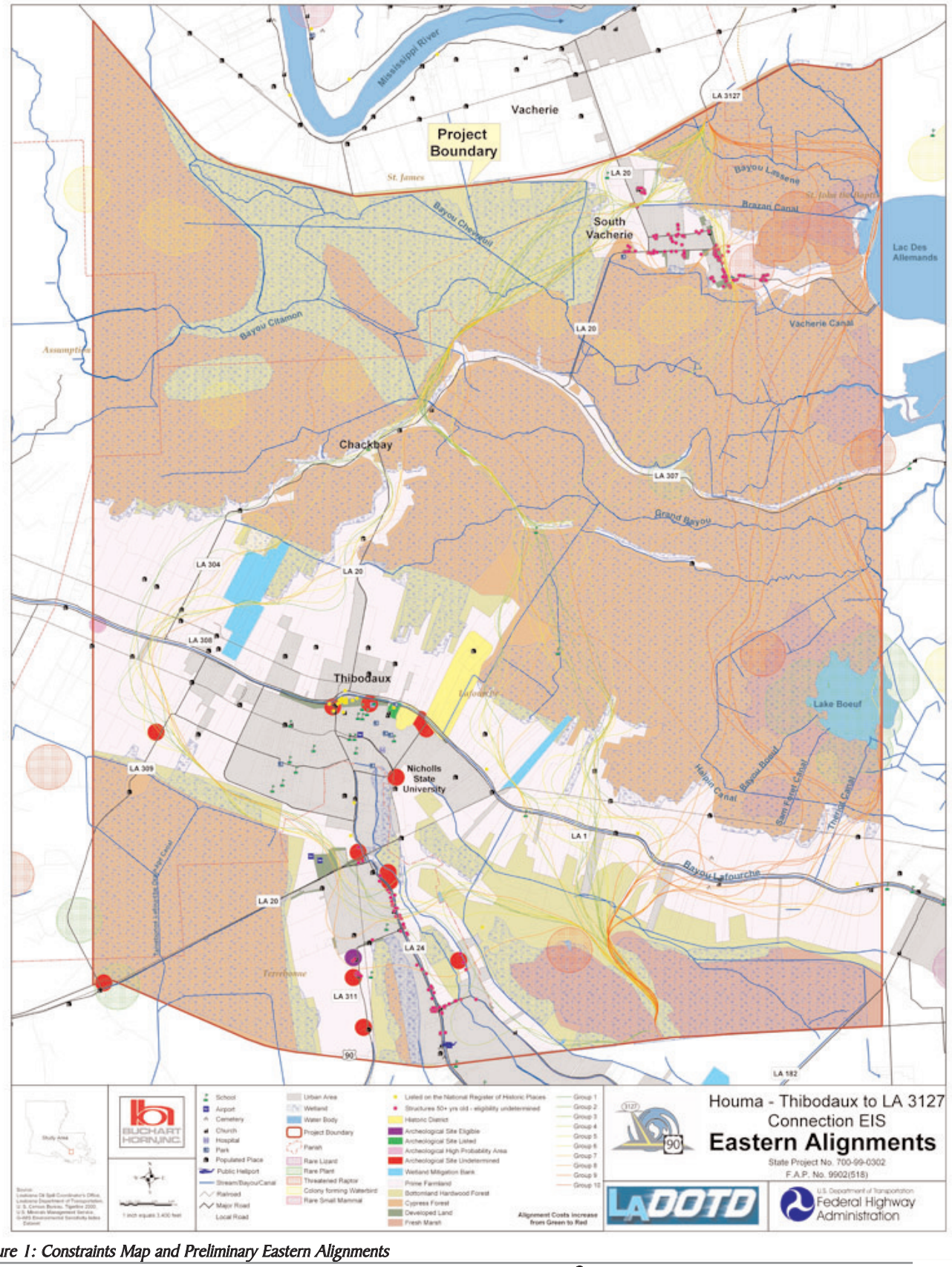


Figure 1: Constraints Map and Preliminary Eastern Alignments

Please note: Only the eastern terminus point is presented here, as an example. QUANTM® runs completed for a more middle and western terminus point on LA 3127 can be reviewed on our website at www.north-southhurricanecorridor.com.

Project Milestones

April 26, 2004	*Notice to Proceed*
July 13, 2004	*Formal Interagency Scoping Meeting*
July 15, 2004	*Public Meeting 1 (Introduction to the Project)*
November 18, 2004	*Public Meeting 2 (Review range of alternatives)*
December 9, 2004	*Community Information Meeting in Vacherie*
Spring 2005	*Public Meeting 3 (Review reduced range of alternatives)*
Fall 2005	*Draft EIS Approved for Distribution*
Winter 2006	*Final EIS Approved for Distribution*
Spring 2006	*FHWA Issues Record of Decision*

Need

Access between the Houma/Thibodaux urban area and the north including the community of Vacherie and the westbank of the Mississippi River is circuitous and generally over two-lane roadways with multiple access points, creating transportation inefficiencies.

Terrebonne, Lafourche, Assumption, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, and St. Mary Parishes are all subject to catastrophic storm damage due to surge inundation as well as wind and rain. This generates the need for major evacuation of the area under certain storm scenarios. Existing evacuation routes generally travel east and west, not directly to the north.

The only four-lane route on the west bank of the Mississippi River providing direct connection to the interstate system is US 90 (future I-49) extending east to New Orleans and west to Lafayette. Accessing LA 3127 would provide linkage to an existing roadway network that includes crossing(s) of the Mississippi River to more directly access I-10 and the interstate system to the North.

Corps of Engineers estimates of the time necessary to clear evacuating vehicles for the seven parishes varies from 14 hours (Lafourche Parish) to 30 hours (St. John the Baptist, St. James, and St. Charles Parishes). These times require early evacuation decisions that are difficult to make because of the unpredictability of storms.

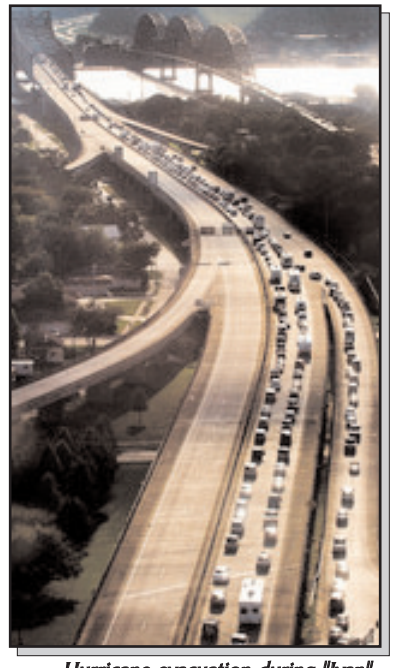
The project team is using the NEPA/404 merger process on this project. "404" refers to Section 404 of the Clean water Act which, briefly, is the process by which the US Army Corp of Engineers (COE) issues a permit to impact wetlands or "Waters of the United States." Receipt of the Section 404 permit is needed before construction of the project can start. By using the NEPA/404 merger process the project team can be assured that the COE is fully aware of and agrees to all the decisions that have been made as the project evolves. By "partnering" with the COE and keeping them fully informed about the project, the DOTD and FHWA hope that the permit will be issued quickly and easily when the time comes.

Traffic Issues

The traffic analysis for the north-south corridor study is designed to determine how the proposed corridor will function in the overall transportation system in the Houma/Thibodaux region north to LA 3127. The purpose of the corridor is to support evacuation and to serve as a transportation link in the regional roadway system. The goal of the traffic analysis will be to maximize the effectiveness of the corridor in meeting these purposes.

The first step in the traffic analysis is to determine how the existing transportation system is now operating. This includes both its physical characteristics and its operational characteristics. This profile of the existing system has been completed. Forecasts to project what the transportation system will look like in the future are currently being developed. Projected traffic volumes are being developed and possible roadway improvements are being identified. The future roadway system's physical and operational characteristics can then be evaluated with respect to potential corridor alignments.

The evaluation of potential corridor alignments focuses on how the corridor will be accessed from the surrounding roadway network. Some alignments may be accessed more effectively than others, while some may require major improvements to the local roadway system for effective access. The evaluation will examine access both for evacuation and general transportation uses. The result will be a comparison of how different proposed corridor alignments support the purpose of the project.



Hurricane evacuation during "Ivan" emphasizes the need for the project

The recent Hurricane Ivan evacuation experience provided "real event" evacuation data that is being incorporated into the traffic analysis. Lessons learned will be applied to the evaluation of the proposed corridor alignments.

Preliminary Toll Study

The project team is aware of the fact that there is no funding in place or reserved for the actual construction of the roadway. Therefore, the project team has supplemented the existing evaluations to include a Preliminary Toll Study. The purpose of the Preliminary Toll Study is to determine the feasibility of using tolls to help finance construction of the proposed facility. The project team has contracted with Wilbur-Smith Associates to perform the Preliminary Toll Study.

QUANTM® Route Optimization Software

The project team is using an innovative computer software program from QUANTM® to help select preliminary alternatives. QUANTM's Route Optimization software uses a terrain model as its foundation and allows entry of assumptions for a variety of engineering and environmental issues and costs. The user may designate areas to be avoided. For example, a critical environmental resource such as a threatened or endangered species habitat can be avoided, or if a resource such as wetlands cannot be avoided, costs for mitigation can be calculated.

Engineering costs include roadway material (asphalt), fill, cut, bridges, culverts, etc. Assumptions may include whether the roadway will be on embankment or elevated on a structure, where the termini points are, and basic engineering criteria such as design speed and curve radius, among others. When all assumptions and

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